BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES FOR HUMAN DIGNITY

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Superiority of Human Life

The duty of a religion is to guide humanity to uphold certain noble principles in order to lead a peaceful life and to maintain human dignity. Otherwise it would be impossible for us to claim superiority as humans, for we would be relegated to the level of other living beings whose only purpose is to obtain food, shelter and sex. If human beings too spend their lives only to satisfy these basic primal needs, then there would be nothing much to show for ourselves as humans. Humans have transcended mere survival and are capable of seeking self actualization.

In Buddhism we call this Dharma. Other living beings cannot realise this Dharma because human intelligence is superior to that of all the other living beings in the universe. Only the human mind can appreciate the Dharma. It is significant to note that humans are the only living beings in this universe who can conceive a system as complex as religion. Even devas and brahmas have no particular religion.

Although we worship devas or brahmas and do some offerings in their name, we must realise that our human intelligence is superior to theirs. That is why a deva or a brahma cannot become a Buddha. Only a human being can attain supreme enlightenment because only he has the capability to develop his intelligence to the highest level.

Given this intelligence man tries to understand the nature of his existence and to formulate an orderly code of conduct which will make him noble and worthy of respect.
Thinkers among men past and present have pondered deeply on three existential questions: "Who am I?" "What am I doing here?" "Am I needed?". The answers to these questions provide the basis for him to lead a meaningful existence. We call these the principles of life.

What are the basic human principles? To answer this question, we must first ask ourselves what is the meaning of the term 'human'. The Pali and Sanskrit languages use the word ***"manussa"*** or ***"manusya"*** when referring to humans. It is a very meaningful word. Incidentally, the English word "Man" is derived from the Sanskrit word ***"manu"*** meaning "to think".

Humans are the only living beings who can cultivate and develop the mind to its maximum level. Such a living being is called *manussa* (human). The word "man" is also derived from the word *mana* meaning mind. Thus one who has a mind to think is called man. With his superior intelligence, man has only to direct and channel his desires and he can make his life to be what he chooses. (Of course when we refer to "man", here we are thinking of all humans, men and women. There is no need to think that women are in any way inferior to men either intellectually or spiritually or morally).

The Chinese definition of human is "one with a heart disposed to kindness". In the human heart, there must be sympathy and honesty. If these two qualities are absent, then one is not regarded as a real human being. Western philosophers define "humans" as those who can use their sense of reasoning. Humans are the only beings who are rational in their behaviour. Other living beings use only their instinct to ensure their survival, pleasure and protection. When the mind is cultivated by abstaining from evil

thoughts and developing the great virtues, one can gain this tranquillity which leads to the purity of the mind.

The Nature of The Human Mind

The human mind can penetrate and analyse elements or world systems in the entire universe. Mind consists of fleeting mental states which constantly arise and subside with lightning rapidity. It is a powerful form of energy. There is in fact no energy that we can compare with the human mind. The mind is the forerunner of all things; mind is supreme and all things have their origin in the mind. The Buddha has said, “I know of no dynamic energy, other than the human mind, which can run so rapidly”. For instance, those who have studied science will readily understand the nature of the atom. An atom changes a few million times within a single second.

In Buddhist psychology, we are told that when the human mind changes 17 times, the physical body changes but once. Atoms and the elements also operate on the same principle. Those who studied biology can understand that the cells and everything in our body undergoes change over time. Our mental energy appears and disappears a thousand times faster than lightning. Such is the nature of the mind.

Besides this, the mind is responsible for everything that happens in the world. The Buddha says, “Mind is responsible for everything, good or bad, that exists in this whole universe”. There is a saying “As you think, so you become. All that we are is the result of what we have thought”.

It is due to our deluded imagination, that we blame God, ghosts and devils for our problems. Some people even believe that our suffering today is the result of some ‘original’ sin which was committed by an archetypal ancestor. Then what about animals? They too suffer from sickness, grow old and die. Do they also suffer as a result of their original sin? Plants also suffer from sickness, aging and death. Are they also faced with these problems due to their original sin?

No one can control the mind of another but if one develops one’s own mind, then one can wield enormous influence over others, for good as well as evil purposes. The development of scientific knowledge could be misused or abused by certain people for selfish purposes. On the other hand, the mind can be controlled and used to appreciate and understand the Dharma or the workings of the Cosmos.

By developing the mind, men and women for example have discovered the force within an atom and they have used this knowledge to do a lot of constructive work for the benefit of mankind. But conversely, in the process they also invented nuclear weapons which could destroy the entire world! If mind is not controlled or trained properly, the dangers that may follow will indeed be unimaginable. One example that springs to mind is Hitler who used his great intelligence for evil purposes.

Almost all other living beings are slowly becoming extinct because of the selfish desire of human beings arising from minds which are not trained properly. They pollute water and air and destroy the environment saying that they are developing it, while in fact they are bent on destruction. We must admit that other living beings do not destroy anything to the extent that human beings do.

Three Natures in Human Life

As human beings, we have three characteristics or natures, namely animal nature, human nature and divine nature. We do not have to wait for rebirth in a heaven or hell to experience this. Animals have limited power of reasoning but by using our intelligence, we humans can subdue or control our animal nature and by doing so, we cultivate our human nature and even discover the divine nature in us.

Animals have no means to control their animalistic nature because they are motivated almost solely by instinct. But as human beings, using our minds to analyse and reason, we have realised that certain things are moral or immoral, that certain things are wicked and dangerous, and that certain things are good and useful not only for ourselves but also for others as well. That is why humans are placed on a higher level than other creatures. By subduing our animal nature, and by developing love and compassion, we develop patience, tolerance, understanding, unity, harmony and goodwill. These are humane qualities.

The primary purpose of religion is to foster and nurture these qualities. However, we must realise that some of these qualities are inherent in us. We had in fact developed some of these sterling qualities even before religions came into existence. The human mind is so advanced that it could very easily be developed to experience heavenly bliss. Other living beings cannot do this. The human mind is a very complex mechanism. It can create the worst kinds of hell. Unlike other creatures which kill for defence or food, the mind can make humans kill for greed, jealousy and even for "fun". And yet he can never be satisfied. As soon as he has satisfied one lust, he immediately craves for something else. As a result, he is constantly unhappy.

Mahatma Gandhi said, *"The world has enough for every one's needs, but never even enough for even one man's greed".* Human beings are fighting among themselves because of that extraordinary craving for more power, more authority as well as more pleasure.

Four Kinds of Religion

There are four kinds of religion in this world namely, Natural, Organised, Revealed and Institutionalised religions.

(1) **Natural religion**

In prehistoric times, primitive man lived in fear because he was surrounded by the mysteries of unexplained natural phenomena. Primitive man naturally feared what he could not understand. Fear comes to those who are not able to comprehend the laws of nature. Fears are nothing more than states of the mind. When early man could not understand the nature and reality of natural phenomena and other natural occurrences, he developed a belief that there is indeed some sort of divine or supernatural power behind these inexplicable occurrences such as the seasons, eclipses, lightning, thunder, rain, the rainbow, volcanic eruptions, flood, drought and various other mysterious occurrences. He thought they were the work of powerful supernatural forces which he had to placate so that they would help him to lead a peaceful life. Accordingly he began to worship them and enlist their aid to ensure his survival and his power over others. Over time these practices and beliefs were organised into formal ritual and prayer, giving rise to what we call "natural religion".

(2) **Organised religion**

Before religions came into existence, human beings had humanistic concepts but there was no "religion" as such. Through the development of their inherent humane qualities and virtues, they organised certain practices and according to their way of thinking developed a code of behaviour to govern the society in which they lived. The primal, instinctual forces of shame and fear (*hiri* and *ottappa*) were the guiding factors which shaped their conduct regarding themselves and others. The resultant moral codes and beliefs eventually developed into religion.

(3) **Revealed Religion**

It originates from a message given by a Supreme Deity through a messenger or prophet in the form of commandments or religious laws. The followers strongly believe that the divine message as revealed to them is the basis of their conduct in spiritual and social matters.

(4) **Institutionalised religion**

In other societies, humans introduced a religious way of life by developing psychology, philosophy, morals and ethics in an orderly manner. In order to maintain order and good conduct, they introduced regulations to cultivate humane qualities, to live peacefully and solve the numerous problems, calamities and disturbances that confront them in this world. These were later formalised, given a spiritual basis and became institutionalised.

A well-known Buddhist scholar Bhikkhu Buddhadasa classifies religion in the following manner:

- Religion of Miraculous Power and Magic based on fear on the part of its followers.
- Religion of Faith - merely based on Faith and Prayer.
- Religion of Karma - based on the self-help principle.
- Religion of Wisdom - based on free thinking (reasoning).
- Religion of Peace – based on non-harming oneself as well as others.
- Religion of Loving Kindness or 'Love' – based on giving up all and everything (for others) etc.

Definition of Buddhism and the Dharma

Buddhism however does not belong to any one of these four groups. In fact, although we do use the word religion when referring to Buddhism we find it difficult to classify Buddhism as a religion according to the meaning of the word as given in the dictionary*. The most appropriate word that could be used to meaningfully express the teachings of the Buddha is "Dharma". In common usage and for convenience we have to use the word "religion", but "Dharma" is indeed very appropriate because it covers a lot more than is conveyed by the word "religion".

"O bhikkhus, the Dharma and the precepts taught by the Buddha send forth a clear light. Never are they observed in secrecy". They are as clear and evident "as the sun-disk or the moon-disk". Furthermore, "Regarding the Dharma taught by the Buddha, there exists no closed fist of the teacher". This means that the Buddha as a teacher kept no secrets in his teaching. Accordingly there are no secrets or mysteries in Buddhism which must be accepted unquestioningly by a follower on the basis of blind faith.

The Dharma is the Ultimate Truth taught by the Buddha. It is a noble way of life which always supports and upholds us without allowing us to descend into other states of sufferings such as hell, the animal and spirit world, as devils or as other unfortunate living beings. So if we follow the Dharma, the Dharma will hold and support us steadfastly without allowing us to suffer in such unfortunate states. That is the definition of the word Dharma in Buddhism. As Buddhism is not a revealed religion, the Buddha did not get any divine message from heaven for he never had any teacher to teach him how to gain his enlightenment. What he did was to use his full effort, eradicating all evil thoughts, words and actions, and by cultivating all the great qualities, by purifying his mind, he finally attained such purity and clarity of mind that he understood completely the workings of every aspect of the Universe. We call this Enlightenment.

Buddhism is the result of the effort of a great man who sacrificed his life and his time in search of the Absolute Truth. We must define what we mean by Absolute Truth because many people claim to know the truth. But there is little agreement among them. What do Buddhists mean by this term? We know that there are many kinds of truths but that not all can be categorised as absolute truths.

Some truths may be relevant for a certain period, but sooner or later, because of changes in circumstances they do not remain as truths. Truth as realised and preached by the Buddha is the Absolute Truth, because there is nobody in this world who can challenge the verity of even one word uttered by him using even the methods of scientific analysis. It is the absolute truth because it is eternal and cannot change according to time or circumstances. Many other beliefs which were regarded as truths in the past have had to be modified according to new knowledge gained by the advances of science.

The Buddha's teaching alone however cannot only be challenged, but is in fact supported by the new discoveries of science. The moral values taught by the Buddha on the basis of the Absolute Truth also remain valid in spite of the developments of civilisation. Buddhists do not have to redefine their position with regard to such topics as:

- EUTHANASIA
- MERCY KILLING
- BIRTH CONTROL
- PRE-MARITAL SEX
- ANIMAL RIGHTS
- THE ENVIRONMENT and so on

Why Religion is Needed

Generally speaking we must agree that all religions have achieved some degree of good, although according to some thinkers like Bertrand Russell religion has done more harm than good to mankind. On jealousy, hatred and discrimination as explained different religionists, he says "Those who have no religion live peacefully without

fighting and quarrelling. Those who have a religion however often fight because of their different religious beliefs". But not all will agree with him.

Every great religion whether it is Christianity, Buddhism, Islam or Hinduism has in fact done some service to humanity. If human beings could have behaved badly in spite of having a religion, then what would have been the position of mankind if there had been no religion at all for them to believe in? If for instance all the Governments of the world were to announce that there would be no law enforcement for twenty four hours it is quite conceivable that this period will be more than enough to destroy entire nations! Needless to say the situation will be further aggravated if there were no religion at all to deter mankind. The point of course is that we cannot blame religion for man's behaviour.

We must add here that there are some highly developed people who are good by nature and who do not need the control imposed by religious people. The Buddha has said that religious teaching must only be regarded as a raft to help one reach the farther shore. Once one has reached a high level of spiritual development one requires no guidance: one becomes naturally moral. The majority of us however need the raft, that is religious principles to help us become morally and spiritually perfect.

Religious Principles are Important

As human beings, we have a responsibility to uphold certain good principles for our own benefit as well as for others. This makes good sense because when we observe the precepts, we also protect others. So long as we are not perfect, if we like to have good neighbours, we must ensure that we have a strong fence, or else it will lead to arguments, disturbances and misunderstanding. When we erect a good fence or wall, we not only protect our house and our family, we would at the same time, protect the houses of our neighbours as well. So observing precepts is exactly like this. When we decide not to kill or harm others, then we allow others to live peacefully without fear. That is the highest contribution that we could render to others. We should stop swindling and cheating others so that they can live peacefully without fear and suspicion. If we know how to fulfil our duties and responsibilities, we uphold our human dignity and intelligence. Naturally, by doing so, we maintain peace, harmony and calmness in our life.

But as Robert Frost says in his lovely poem "Mending Wall", if we are good by nature and our neighbours are good by nature, then fences become redundant. Some so called primitive societies in the past did actually live such ideal lives. But as far as we are concerned especially in urban societies, we need the fences of religions to protect ourselves and others.

To do this we observe religious precepts *(sila). Sila* means discipline to train the mind. We train ourselves by observing some religious principles, knowing the dangers of violating them. There is a difference between Buddhist precepts and the commandments and religious laws of other faiths. Many people follow their religious obligations due to the dread of punishment. It is quite possible that without the threat of hell-fire many people would not take their religious laws seriously.

There is a two pronged approach to the observance of *sila* or precepts. When we refrain from killing by knowing the cruelty and suffering that will be inflicted on other beings, it is *Varitta Sila:* Not to do evil (Avoidance/Refraining). At the same time, when we develop kindness, sympathy and harmony, that is called *Caritta Sila:* To do good

(Positive Performance). We have to cultivate both these negative and positive aspects of virtue.

If there is no punishment, people will take the liberty to commit wicked things without showing any mercy. In Buddhism, the observance of sila or precepts means: "I train my mind not to do certain harmful things, not because of God or fear of his punishment but understanding that they are wrong. I do not fear punishment or expect reward, but I do good for its own sake, because it results in the well-being of others and "myself".

The Buddha said "I advise you according to my own experience. It is not a divine message given to me. I have done some bad deeds during my previous births and I can remember how I had to suffer as a result of such misdeeds. That is why I am telling you it is better not to do bad things so as to avoid sufferings. I have on the other hand done a lot of good or meritorious deeds during my previous life and hence I can understand what a wonderful, peaceful, prosperous life I experienced because of the good deeds. So I advise you also to do some good deeds, so that you too could experience similar good results". If you wish to know more about this subject read the Jataka Stories which record the experiences of the Buddha in his previous lives.

In Buddhism, we cannot find commandments, dogmas, religious laws or threats of religious punishment. Religion is not meant to punish but to advise people what to do and what not to do. If you have committed any evil deed, you will have to face the consequences. It is not that the Buddha or the religion will punish you. Your own action creates your own heaven and hell. Another person cannot do that for you.

As I said earlier, even primitive man had a natural sense of moral behaviour and he could distinguish right from wrong. But as societies developed, this natural sense had to be translated into codes of behaviour to maintain law and order. To ensure that they would be followed, the leaders represented them as being divinely sanctioned with eternal rewards or punishments. The end result was of course that people were controlled and managed to perform in a socially acceptable manner. In this way we can argue that religion did to some extent do some service to humanity.

Benefits of Contentment

One day a King approached the Buddha and asked a question. "When I look at your disciples I can see serenity, cheerfulness and a very radiant complexion in them. I have also heard that they take only one meal a day, but I really cannot understand how they maintain this lifestyle". The Buddha gave a beautiful answer. "My disciples do not regret what they might have done in the past but to continue to do more and more meritorious deeds. It is not be repenting, praying and worshipping but by doing some service to others that people can overcome the mistakes that they might have done in the past. My disciples never worry about their future. They are satisfied with whatever they receive, and thereby maintain contentment. They would never say that this or that is not enough for them. That is their way of life. Therefore they are able to maintain a state of serenity, cheerfulness and a good complexion as a result of that contentment".

Anyone too can try to maintain this cheerfulness by being contented. Should anybody ask why we cannot be satisfied in our lives although we have more than enough things, what would be the correct answer?

The correct answer to give is: “Because we have no contentment”. If there is indeed contentment, we would never say that we are not satisfied with this or that. We cannot satisfy ourselves due to conflict between our insatiable selfish desire and the law of impermanence *(anicca).*

One of the best advises given by the Buddha for us to practise as a principle is “Contentment is the highest wealth”. A wealthy man is not necessarily a rich man. A wealthy man is in perpetual fear of his life. He is always in a state of suspicion and fear thinking people are waiting to harm or swindle him. A wealthy man cannot go out without a security guard, and in spite of the many iron gates and locks there are in his house, he cannot sleep without fear and worry.

In comparison, a contented man is indeed a very lucky man because his mind is free from all those disturbances. He indeed is rich. What then is contentment? When a person thinks “This much is enough for me and for my family and I do not want anything beyond that”, then that is contentment. If everybody could think in this way, then there cannot be any problems. When we maintain this contentment, jealousy can never cloud our mind and thereby we allow others also to enjoy their lives. If there is no jealousy, anger also cannot arise. If there is no anger, there will be no violence and bloodshed and everybody can then live peacefully.

A contented life always gives one hope and confidence. This is not idealistic. For more than twenty five centuries men and women in the community of Buddhists monks and nuns have lived such peaceful lives. And many Buddhist householders too have lived contentedly not allowing their greed to overtake their basic needs. It is surprising how little we really need to be contented. Think about it.

Learn to Face Facts in Life

Because of selfish desire we like to lead a perpetual permanent, peaceful and prosperous life notwithstanding the fact that things that which appear before us are all impermanent. So our selfish desires cannot ever be satisfied because everything is impermanent. Change is a universal constant. Nothing remains static, and we are condemned to grasp at things which forever remain beyond our reach – because we, and the things change the moment they are touched. But regardless of such changes, goaded by delusion, and selfish desires we desperately hope for an unchangeable life.

One day the Buddha advised Ananda, “If anybody should ask the question as to why death takes place, you will have to tell them that death takes place because of birth. If there is no birth then there is no death. If you try to prevent death by force, then you do not understand the nature. You are in fact going against the laws of nature”.

People generally are happy with birth but have an intense fear of decay and death. If there is no birth then there will be no death. The setting sun in one country becomes the rising sun in another country. So a setting sun is not the end of the sun. In the same manner, death itself is not the end of a life for death in fact is the beginning of another life. Birth then is the beginning of death*. Death is the beginning of a life. Birth brings the death certificate. So if we want to avoid death, we must prevent birth.

Therefore we must be wise not to repeat our follies and prepare ourselves not to suffer again.

Through observation and study we understand why there is so much injustice and inequality in the world. We begin to see that it is not the work of a whimsical creator but the working our own good or bad action (karma) in the past. We can even observe the good or evil effects of our actions in this very life: good begets good, evil begets evil.

Buddhism for Worldly People

Worldly life is indeed very troublesome. It is therefore not so easy for laymen to practise a religious way of life. If they try to be religious by changing their habits then that can become a nuisance to others who live in their midst. Their family members and friends may not appreciate their new way of life. However, if they change their ways, gradually others will have a chance to adapt to them and make adjustments.

On the other hand, one can also become religious without disturbing others by cultivating loving-kindness, honesty, patience, tolerance, unity, harmony and understanding. However, these good qualities can also create disturbances when others take advantage for their own benefit. It is really not necessary to go to extremes to renounce everything. Just lead a normal life.

The Buddha introduced this practical religious way of life for lay-people and householders according to their worldly demands. Without renunciation, lay people should not try to emulate the way of life of monks and nuns. Similarly, monks also should not follow lay peoples' way of life. Today, some of them have mixed up many of these methods.

By recognising the difficulties they have to face in discharging their duties, responsibilities, commitments and obligations which they have to fulfil in order to support their families, people have to do certain things. The Buddha said they can maintain four kinds of happiness by earning and investing; experiencing worldly pleasures in a reasonable way from income righteously earned; by avoiding indebtedness through proper management of their income and expenditure, and by leading a righteous life. When people come to realise that they have not done any harm to anybody, then they need not have any guilty feeling. This blissful feeling is indeed the most remarkable happiness one can experience. All the other kinds of gross happiness will disappear from the mind.

This happy state that they maintain and retain in the mind will remain until their death and support them to have a better rebirth because they will depart from this world without having any form of confusion in their mind. This is the way people have to adjust their way of life if they want to lead a meaningful worldly life. Apart from the majority of householders a few men and women decide to voluntarily renounce the worldly life altogether and resort to the life of a monk or nun. Such people find happiness and peace of a different sort.

Open – mindedness in Buddhism

Upali, a very wealthy follower of another religion, once came to see the Buddha saying that he wanted to become his disciple. The Buddha asked "Why do you want to become my follower?" Upali replied "People say that your teachings are wonderful". Buddha then asked, "Have you heard any of my teachings?" When Upali replied in the negative, Buddha's next question was, "Then how do you know whether you can practise my teaching or not? That is not the way for a man to change his religion. One must study and try to understand the teaching before one is convinced".

Then Upali, became even more determined to follow the Buddha and said, “Venerable Sir, I think this advice of yours is more than enough for me to understand the nature of your real teaching. If I had approached another religious leader, he would at once have accepted me and would have announced that so and so had also become a follower of his religion. But instead Sir, you advised me to study and consider whether to accept your teaching or not”.

When the Buddha wanted to give a sermon, he did not conduct it just like giving a public talk. He would first study the minds and understanding capacity of his listeners and advise them according to their mental capability so that they could grasp his teaching easily.

How to see the Buddha

One of the disciples of Buddha named Vakkali had a regular habit everyday of gazing upon the Buddha’s person. The Buddha having noticed this, asked him, “What are you doing here? Vakkali’s reply was “Venerable Sir, when I look at the serene features and good complexion of your body, that itself gives me a lot of satisfaction”. The Buddha then asked “What do you expect to gain by admiring this body which is dirty, ugly, smelly, impermanent? One who sees the Dhamma, sees the Buddha. This should help you to understand how to see the real Buddha. If you indeed want to see the real Buddha, then you must create that Buddha in your mind through his teaching".

We have a wrong concept about life. We regard our physical body as our life itself. We cannot see in its proper perspective. Mental energy and the life process both work together. The body is merely the shelter to house our physical being. We devote our whole life to look after, feed, wash and clean to beautify our body by spending so much money not knowing that our body creates enormous unsatisfactoriness and suffering.

Three Main Principles in Buddhism

Discipline *(Sila),* development of a well trained mind *(Samadhi)* and the attainment of supreme wisdom *(Panna)* are the three basic principles in human life. Only human beings can cultivate these good qualities.

The prime objective among the three basic principles in Buddhism is the observance of precepts – *sila*.

Sila

Man is a social being and develops his character in relation to the society in which he belongs, so whatever he does, leaves its impression not only on himself but also on that society. The observance of the moral precepts must, therefore, also leave their impression. Morality, includes all the virtues of the honest respectable person. It has been identified with virtues in general, and many admirable qualities have been interpreted in relation to the ideals of purification and restraint as they are realised with the body, speech and mind. It is usually understood as referring to the five moral precepts which constitute the layman’s definitive code of practical ethics. He has to begin the spiritual journey by taking the five precepts and every lay devotee is expected to observe these five elementary rules of conduct.

It is in keeping with the Buddhist spirit that its observance should be based on experience and reason. The final goal of Buddhism is supramundane, but it is always down to earth and in the observance of the five precepts the Buddhist is kept in close touch with reality. Exercising his will and reason man realised that by taking a certain path he can contribute not only to his own welfare but also to the welfare of the human race. He wills to take that path. He is the recognition of manhood, of man's own power and responsibility.

Sila or moral development gain through self discipline. We must learn how to live as harmless and gentle human beings. In simple language we must know how to live without disturbing the peace and happiness of others. If we are able to do this it will indeed be a great achievement. Discipline, good conduct, precepts and morals are all synonymous with this word *'sila'*. This is the foundation on which to start a religious way of life.

If a house is built without laying a proper foundation, it will be very unstable. Modern man has learnt the hard way how important it is to live in *'sila'*. It means respecting the right of others to exist. If we believe that the world was created solely for our own benefit, then we will take from it whatever we want indiscriminately; without caring about what happens to other living beings and the environment like plants, rivers, the atmosphere and so on. In the end, as a result of major ecological imbalances of nature created by us in our modern way of life, we will be destroying ourselves. A good Buddhist on the other hand has a deep respect and concern for the well being of every other being.

In his infinite wisdom, the Buddha knew that we cannot be perfect at once. Hence, he starts by encouraging us to restrain from committing harmful deeds. Once we make progress in laying down a firm moral foundation, we can gradually practise mental purification. Buddhism allows an individual to make progress on the basis of his level of realisation and does not dogmatically impose on him a rigid code of conduct without regard to his potentials, level of development and attitudes.

Precepts are useful for cultivating humane qualities and virtues. These are qualities important for maintaining peace and happiness. The motivation for upholding these precepts is not the fear of punishment, but understanding and compassion. When the Buddha advised us, "Not to do evil", it was with the welfare of others in mind.

As human beings, it is our duty to perform some service to others by practising generosity, kindness and giving a helping hand to others who need our support to rid themselves of grievances, worries and other problems. By rendering selfless service to others, not only do we bring benefits to others, we reduce our selfishness as well. We should not perform a good deed with ulterior motives, since our deeds will be marred by the impure intentions.

So the real Buddhist concept of "Not to do evil" and "To do good" is not based on punishment and reward, but on the need to reduce our selfish desire and cultivate our mental purity. We do not use fear to force people into complying with these precepts. Using fear instead of understanding will not give rise to the cultivation of sympathetic feelings and can result in people becoming superstitious and dogmatic.

The avoidance of evil and the performance of good are highly commendable, but they are not enough. From experience we know that as long as the greed, anger and illusion which are deeply embedded in the mind are not removed, we are still capable of

committing some bad deeds. Hence, there is a need for us to purify the mind. To do this, we will have to constantly watch the mind and remove from it mental impurities. When impure thoughts and motivations are extinguished, the mind is always good and pure, and we will reach the final goal.

As human beings however, we know that our present existence is not the first and the last life. The advantage of becoming a human being is that we know this and can prepare for a life after death. Many people hope to go to heaven after their deaths but when we consider how some religions explain it, we are forced to conclude that they really have no idea what it is or even where it is.

When a rich man asked the Buddha's advice on how he could go to heaven after his death, the Buddha answered, "Why do you want to wait until you die to experience heavenly bliss? Even while you are living in this world you can experience heavenly bliss if you know how to handle this life properly".

The Buddha was a practical religious teacher who did not introduce mythology, temptation or fear into people's minds. People must learn how to make use of life properly, how to avoid problems, troubles, worries and disturbances, so as to gain more knowledge and understanding. After developing understanding, they can adjust their lives accordingly.

Pleasure and Happiness

Although many disturbances are not apparent to us, certain evil thoughts which are deeply rooted in the mind may still remain. At some moment we may be quiet and look nice because there are no disturbances to agitate us, but if some disturbances arise, we soon change our attitude and become violent and ugly. The pleasure that momentarily appears in the mind we mistakenly regard as happiness. It is in fact not happiness. Pleasure is merely emotional satisfaction. The fleeting nature of pleasure is such that it disappears at the very next moment.

The seeking of pleasure must not be confused with the seeking of happiness. Pleasure is elusive, temporary, and can leave a bitter after-taste. Also, it can be costly, yet unsatisfactory. Not so happiness, which does not have to be purchased; it comes from an inner source – the mind, and it is long lasting.

The pleasure we have at this moment sometimes creates disappointment because of the fleeting nature of the pleasure. At the same time, we cannot gain happiness by keeping mental impurities such as fear, anger, jealousy, malice and ill-will in the mind. When these are not active in the mind, then we regard the brightness that temporarily appears in the mind as happiness.

Happiness Gained Through Merits

To achieve happiness we have to do more and more meritorious deeds. The meaning of meritorious deeds is doing some service to others to release them from their sufferings. The happiness that we gain by doing good is more important than material gain. Whenever we do some good deeds with confidence and understanding, we gain happiness and a sense of well-being. This is what we call merits. The mental state we develop in this life determines the kind of life we will experience after death. At death, there is nothing to help us except for our own merits or karma. Therefore, we must

strive to do as much good as we can in this life because it is the only insurance we have to ensure rebirth in a fortunate existence.

There are certain misinformed people who put valuable things into a coffin thinking that such items would benefit the deceased in his or her life. We have to use our common sense and understand things without blindly following certain outmoded traditions of our forefathers. The time has come for us to eliminate such practices because we notice that other religionists would take advantage of our ignorance to condemn and ridicule Buddhists for what they do, thinking that they are indeed Buddhist practices. The Buddha, for instance, did not ask his followers to burn anything in the name of the departed. He advised us to burn only our mental impurities.

Samadhi Through Meditation

Samadhi is the second principle; concentration or cultivation of the mind to experience peace and calmness by focusing the mind on one particular object. The minds of those who have no such experience are very weak. The reason why their minds are very weak is due to the fear that disturbs them. We have feelings of insecurity and suspicion within us because of that weakness. Every minute we dissipate our mental energy unprofitably through our five senses. These five channels extract our mental energy and use that energy to attract external objects which cause suspicion, fear and worry. They can at the same time create what appears as emotional satisfaction and excitement. Eventually, in this way, we disturb the mind. We collect defilements from outside through the senses and confuse our mind. Thus the mind has no time to relax and becomes weak because of this wastage of energy. It is like a waterfall which goes on pouring and spreading water everywhere because there is no proper channel to divert the water for systematic use. A hydro-electric dam however channels this energy to create electricity which can be put to various good uses.

An engineer, having seen the colossal wastage of falling water decides to construct a dam to harness the water and produce hydro electricity to illuminate the whole country. In exactly the same manner we waste our mental energy through lack of focus. The Buddha advised us not to waste our mental energy through the senses, but to get the mind to relax and free it from constantly making choices regarding external stimuli. It is indeed a real torture for the mind. During that period of relaxation we can concentrate on one neutral object without allowing the mind to run here and there. And thereby we develop our mind. *"Bhavana"* means development of the mind, that is to accumulate and harness the lost energy and regenerate itself. When it is fully developed the mind becomes a very dynamic force and all the fear, suspicion and insecurity we have will disappear. Then we get courage, knowledge, understanding and wisdom.

In order to maintain a good standard of moral conduct, it is also essential to practise meditation, which is called *samadhi*. *Samadhi* is the fixed or tranquil state of the mind. The undisciplined mind is in the habit of wandering here and there and is difficult to control. It may follow any harmful idea, or imagination. In order to prevent this unhealthy tendency the mind should be concentrated on a selected object of meditation.

In the course of practice, the mind will gradually become more restrained and remain obediently fixed on the object to which it is directed. By choosing suitable objects we can counteract specific mental weaknesses. For example, by meditating on loving-kindness we can assuage the traits of enmity, wrath and envy. By meditating on the repulsive aspects of the body we can diminish lust and infatuation. By contemplating the inevitability and unpredictability of death we can dispel complacency and apathy.

By recollecting the special qualities of the Buddha we can overcome depression, anxiety and negativity. By the development of compassion one forgets one's own troubles and realises the omnipresence of suffering.

By repeated practice of meditative absorption the Buddha and his disciples came to possess psychic powers. Although such powers are only developed by very deep concentration they are not considered, by most schools of Buddhism, to be essential to the attainment of the main goal of Buddhism, Nibbana. Nibbana is the extinction of desire, hatred and delusion. If we want to gain happiness, we should allow our mind to relax and develop it to uproot the evil forces which lurk there.

During the time we meditate, we experience peace but as soon as we stop our meditation and go back to our normal way of thinking, peace and happiness will disappear and disturbance will return. The water in a pond may be covered with dry leaves on the surface, but the water beneath will be very clear. You can push the dry leaves apart and see the clear water. But when you remove your hand the water will be covered by the dry leaves again. Meditation helps us to reveal the "clear water" of the mind. Enlightenment is when the leaves are removed permanently and water remains perpetually clear.

When we meditate, our mind becomes pure. This is because we do not allow evil thoughts to disturb the mind. In the same way when we stop meditating, all the evil thoughts become active again.

When we cover green grass with a bucket for a few weeks and expose it again, we can notice that the green leaves have turned to a pale colour due to lack of sunlight. Similarly, when we meditate, lots of changes take place in the mind. We feel calm and serene with no anger because our mind is under the beneficial influence of concentration. But when we return to our normal way of life, once again those negative thoughts will return, just like the grass that you covered changed colour because you prevented sunlight. As part of your practice you just develop concentration to such a degree that you guard your mind constantly and never allow it to relapse into the confused state. The purpose of meditation is to help you train the mind to constantly remain pure and undefiled.

Knowledge and Wisdom

Wisdom is not knowledge. We do gain knowledge after listening, reading and observing many things in this world but it is not wisdom in the real sense. Wisdom only appears in the mind when mental hindrances, obstructions and other impurities are not active in the mind. There are many learned people all over the world who not doubt have wonderful knowledge but unfortunately some of them lack proper wisdom.

Many people are intelligent but their behaviour however is not reasonable, as some are hot tempered, egoistic, emotional, jealous, greedy and temperamental. On the other hand, there are others who are very kind and although they have patience, tolerance and many other good qualities, their wisdom is very poor as they can be easily misled by others. If we develop our generosity without proper understanding, we could get into trouble as certain people can take undue advantage of us. Understanding and good qualities must therefore go together.

Panna: Release Through Wisdom

Panna - Wisdom is the third and last stage of the path. After undertaking the observance of morality, the aspirant practises meditation. When the mind is well-concentrated, he is able to understand the true nature of things. Wisdom is the right understanding of the world in the light of its transience, dissatisfaction and insubstantiality. Knowledge is of three kinds:

1) that acquired by learning,
2) that acquired by thinking, and
3) that acquired by meditation. This wisdom is the apex of the three-fold training which leads to Nibbana.

When illusion, ignorance and evil thoughts disappear from the mind, brightness appears in their place. That brightness is enlightenment. The more we learn worldly things with a deluded mind, the more we increase our ignorance. We have to learn how to open the mind. When the mind is fully opened, then development takes place; only then can wisdom, understanding and purity appear in the mind. That is inner development.

We cannot bring this brightness, purity and realisation from the outside. They have to emanate from within. *Sila, Samadhi, Panna* – mental training, and calmness of the mind and higher wisdom, are the three main religious principles in Buddhism for the development of human life. Further development of *sila* or precepts for the attainment of sainthood is called *Adhi Sila*. Calmness or tranquillity of the consciousness is call *Adhi Citta (Samadhi*). Gaining higher wisdom through the development of insight – *Vipassana* is called *Adhi Panna*. These therefore are the three Buddhist principles for training the human mind.

The Scheme of Threefold Training

"An alternative formulation of the Buddhist scheme of moral development is presented in the form of three progressive and mutually dependent factors of moral training. They are *sila*, consisting of moral practices involving the conscious and voluntary transformation of one's patterns of bodily and verbal behaviour; *samadhi*, the development of mental composure; and *panna,* the cultivation of the insight that leads to moral perfection. *Sila* is believed to be the foundation on which the other two stages in the path are to be developed. This formulation of the path reveals not only the pragmatic character of Buddhism, but also the psychological insights on which the practical aspects of the Buddhist moral system are based. The Buddha speaks of the path to spiritual perfection, or the attainment of *Nibbana* as a graduated one leading systematically from one step to the other. The perfection of *sila* is recognised as the foundation or the basis of all spiritual endeavour. An intelligent man is supposed to establish himself in *sila* and develop his mind *(citta*) and cultivate wisdom *(panna)*. It is such a person which is said to be able to disentangle the tangles of evil (A. V. p.66)". *(Encyclopaedia of Buddhism)*